AGENDA
COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING
MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF PINCHER CREEK
November 24, 2026
11:00 am
Council Chambers

1) Approval of Agenda

2) Delegations:

    a) 11:00 am Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association - Zonation Update and Draft Cooperation Plan

3) Closed Session

    a) Request Regarding Winter Maintenance of Unimproved Road – ATIA Sec. 29.1
    b) Draft 2027 Budget – ATIA Sec. 29.1

4) Round Table

5) Adjournment

Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association

Zonation Update and Draft Cooperation Plan

(prepared for MD of Pincher Creek Council meeting, November 24, 2026)

Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association (WBRA) has begun preparing documentation for our upcoming ten-year Periodic Review process that ensures we continue to meet the criteria for designation as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and are adequately addressing the complementary activities of biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, and capacity building in local communities. Under the Man and the Biosphere program, every biosphere reserve/region also needs three interrelated zones known as the core area, the buffer zone, and a transition area or 'area of cooperation', and we are close to finalizing our revised zonation. Additionally, we are updating our five-year strategic Management Plan (or Cooperation Plan, as we choose to call this document to reflect the reliance on community partnerships).

Proposed zonation update

We worked with a consultant to host a workshop for municipal representatives in March 2026 and to develop a process to review and update Waterton Biosphere Region (WBR) zonation now and into the future. The process was to be repeatable, grounded by community input, and based on publicly available data sources (i.e., Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute [ABMI] land cover and human footprint data layers). Municipal representatives provided input on compatible and non-compatible land uses within the buffer zone as well as land uses that may be conditionally compatible based on size, surrounding land use, intensity of use, etc.

We decided the original methodology proposed by the consultant introduced concepts and thresholds not easily understood or explained to stakeholders, partners, governments, and landowners. Revisions undertaken this summer incorporated the valuable workshop input from municipal representatives to produce a simplified process. The new process essentially involves answering the following two questions:

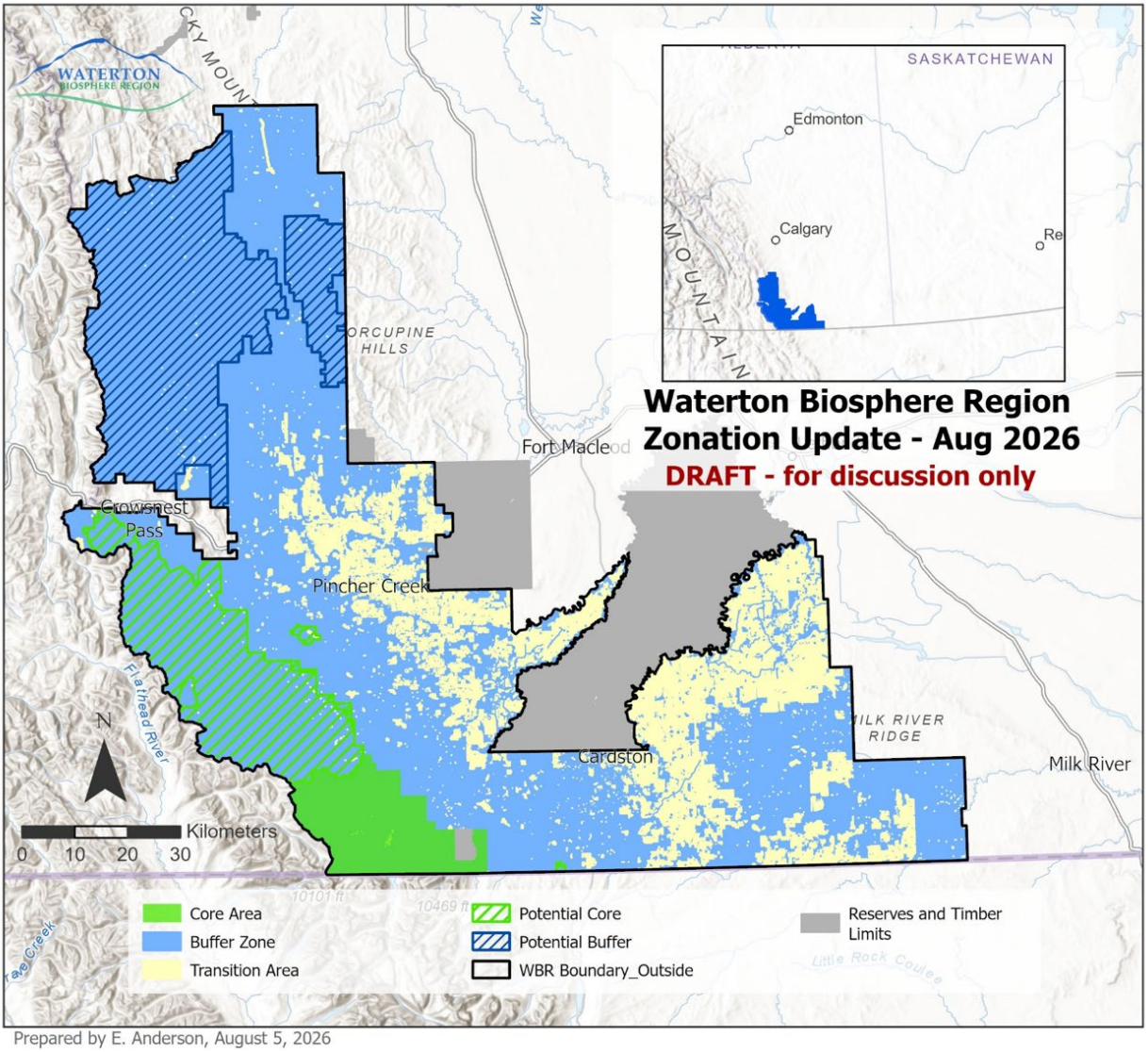
(1) Is a given land use compatible/non-compatible with the buffer zone requirements[1] and
(2) Does the land use have a small, discrete footprint (i.e., less than 50 ha total in WBR) and thus should assume the compatibility rating of the surrounding landscape?

In general, land uses retaining permanent cover were viewed as representative of buffer zone, while permanent alterations of habitat cover were more aligned with transition area. ABMI human footprint data was used to map and classify any land uses present on the landscape following this process. Thus, the resulting zonation map reflects land uses permitted by the appropriate regulatory authority and existing on the land (i.e., realistic, not aspirational). The draft zonation under this revised process is shown in the figure below.

Discussions also continue with Government of Alberta on expanding the core area through the inclusion of Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Park with an answer anticipated by early

[1] *contains activities compatible with conservation - such as research, education, and sustainable resource use*

December. Any zonation changes are ultimately subject to approval by UNESCO – this is part of the requirement to remain within the program and confers no authority or regulatory powers within a biosphere reserve.



Prepared by E. Anderson, August 5, 2026

Draft Cooperation Plan

We are also undergoing an update of our current five-year strategic plan (i.e., the WBR Cooperation Plan 2023-2027). The 2027-2031 Cooperation Plan update involves a review of current priorities, strategies, and actions to ensure alignment with organizational and community priorities. Based on input from the WBR Board of Directors, priorities and strategies will remain the same as the previous Cooperation Plan; some new/updated actions are proposed. Relevant actions are identified as ongoing (currently funded), short-term (anticipated funding), medium-term (funding will need to be sought in near future), and long-term (aspirational) to reflect the reality of granting cycles and a lack of core operational funds.

Priority 1. Build long-term community relationships

- Strategy 1 – Facilitate, encourage, and contribute to conversations relevant to our communities.
- Strategy 2 – Explore and support opportunities to elevate Blackfoot values, ways of knowing, and conservation leadership.
- Strategy 3 – Promote linkages between researchers, universities, and local communities.
- Examples of actions aligned with this priority include supporting community conversations (e.g., providing data, hosting meetings) around complex issues at the intersection of conservation and sustainable development, exploring workshop opportunities for residents and landowners around climate change adaptation, wildfire prevention/mitigation, etc., and promoting knowledge sharing between Blackfoot Elders, youth, private landowners and stewards, WBRA board, staff, members, (e.g., around Blackfoot keystone species and Blackfoot language).

Priority 2. Support resilient landscapes and livelihoods

- Strategy 1 – Help reduce conflict between people and wildlife to promote coexistence.
- Strategy 2 – Support landowners and land stewards in conservation and stewardship of biodiversity and resilient habitats.
- Strategy 3 – Promote and support invasive and non-native species awareness, prevention, and control.
- Strategy 4 – Explore ways to advance nature-positive economic diversification within WBR.
- Strategy 5 – Monitor changes in biodiversity, land use, and socioeconomic metrics, using available datasets, established programs, and existing resources wherever possible.
- Examples of actions aligned with this priority include providing locally relevant input into discussions regarding grizzly bear population monitoring, supporting landowners in implementing on-the-ground stewardship or coexistence projects (e.g., watering system improvements, beaver pond levellers, bear-resistant grain bin doors), and building capacity towards emerging sustainable tourism opportunities.

Priority 3. Promote and deliver educational opportunities

- Strategy 1 – Maintain and broaden outdoor experiential learning opportunities for youth.
- Strategy 2 – Expand opportunities for adult education and training that address issues central to those living in the Waterton Biosphere Region.
- Strategy 3 – Increase awareness of WBR and the WBRA and engagement of those living within the biosphere area.
- Examples of actions aligned with this priority include continuing to lead or support youth outdoor experiential learning programming and offering community engagement opportunities and workshops in support of our programs or aligned with issues of community interest.

The draft WBRA Cooperation Plan 2027-2031 document is available at https://bit.ly/4yZXAVC. Our ask is two-fold:

(1) Does the MD have any comments on the updated WBR zonation or see additional actions that should be addressed in the Cooperation Plan?
(2) Given the stated priorities and strategies, are there new opportunities for the WBRA and the MD to collaborate?

Any comments or feedback can be forwarded to info@watertonbiosphere.com by December 15, 2026.